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ABSTRACT

America is facing a new frontier between meritocracy, where only the bright and highly motivated are educated, and social egalitarianism's universal education. Studies of student flow, the changing clientele of higher education, the distribution and differentiation of youth, lifestyle differences, and stabilizing enrollments indicate that universal higher education is unlikely. However, efforts toward the lesser goal of universal access merely support a new kind of meritocracy, which is reinforced by master plans resulting in the poor and uneducated attending certain institutions while the bright and affluent attend others. Selective admissions increase these inequities and poor interinstitutional articulation thwarts the mobility needed for full educational development. Until recently, achievement levels in postsecondary education demonstrated the compatibility of equality of opportunity and excellence in higher education. A decline in these levels has shaken the nation's confidence in the desirability of continued expansion of the college world. A period of assessment and reform is essential in the areas of institutional management and allocation of resources; post-secondary educational purpose; new approaches to equity; affirmation of the primacy of teaching and student development; and creation of educational alternatives. Subsequent to these reforms, a positive kind of meritocracy, which would affirm the merit of all persons, will be possible. (DD)

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MERITOCRACY II

By

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Paper Number Sixteen
PERSPECTIVES ON THE CHURCH AND THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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CHANGING DEMANDS FOR POSTSCHOOL EDUCATION ARE WORLDWIDE

The United States has not been alone in seeking new solutions to the changing demands for postschool education in a time of economic stringency and changing beliefs about where, when, and how people should be educated for an uncertain future. Most western nations, for example, are passing from elitism into mass or popular education beyond secondary school. While our country--having already demonstrated its ability to identify and to educate its bright and highly motivated youth--faces a new frontier between meritocracy and social egalitarianism. In both phases of educational development new institutions emerge, governmental intrusion increases, and traditional institutions of higher education are challenged and threatened. Witness the emergency of the binary system of postschool education and the Open University in Great Britain from a web of governmental policies which invite or mandate changes in institutional missions, alliances, and means of support; or U68, a Royal Commission plan which seeks to reform Swedish universities by dragging them screaming into the late 20th century in order to serve the economic and social needs of that nation; or Japan which chooses a different way of responding to astonishing new demands for advanced education in that country by upgrading its small private colleges through massive government grants and through extensive regional and national television networks.

As we think about these and similar changes abroad and in the United States knowledge about student flow from school to work and to further education is essential, not only in defining the issues, but in predicting the likely outcome of policies and practices which seek to serve diverse students and changing societal needs. No nation has monitored the flow patterns of students over such a long period of time and in such depth as has the United States. I am inclined to believe that this knowledge has influenced legislation as well as the behavior of those in schools and colleges who carry responsibilities for making things work.

Studies of Student flow essential

Although I have been responsible for specific studies of student flow from school to college or work, I wish to share with you points of view which emerge from the full sweep of thought about the changing clientele of American higher education. In doing so I will focus on three issues:

Changing clientele of American higher education

(1) Who gets educated and where;

(2) What impact will certain contemporary policies and practices have on the first question; and

(3) What can we do to help students improve the quality of their decisions about education.

One of the two books on these topics which I published recently is entitled

The distribution and differentation of youth

The Distribution and Differentiation of Youth. I was compelled to choose this title by the dramatic evidence in our studies about the differential outcomes of passage from the school environment to instant adulthood (work, marriage, family, taxes) for some, or to an array of institutional environments which may nurture a prolongation of youth for others.

True, 20 per cent of American boys and girls still drop out of school without ceremony, and those who do are generally the least prepared personally and educationally to face the pressures of adult life. But for those who do graduate, the worlds ahead are quite different for that half which seeks to enter the work force and the other half which largely constitutes the entering classes of our college and universities.

Lifestyle differences

These life style differences are in part the results of convictions about education in our society which inflict damage to self-esteem when the decision is made not to enter college. Almost 95 per cent of my sample of seniors in California, for example, reported on the eve of leaving high school that they and their parents believed that one needed to go to college in order to get ahead. This may be a pragmatic manifestation of what Martin Trow describes as one of the main values of higher education--... an increased belief in one's own capacities to handle broad responsibilities,

contribute to the solution of important problems and have an impact on the larger society. Keniston puts this two-world phenomenon in a profound developmental context. In claiming that adolescence itself is a recent discovery (100 years at most), he suggests that the college student is very different from the traditional adolescent. College is viewed as a new stage of life, a further postponement of full adulthood, even a kind of apprenticeship for adulthood. Tussman takes an additional step by claiming that college is the most crucial of battlefields--a place where not only individuals come to know themselves but where the society comes to self-consciousness. If these beliefs are even partially true they have profound implications for an affluent democratic society which so divides itself.

College—a new stage of life

Who gets educated and who doesn't? My studies, like others, document the potency of social class in determining who goes to college and where. Patricia Cross has done a splendid paper on this issue, and predicts that the new students to higher education in the coming decade will be largely from this lower half, as determined by measured ability and social class. This seems rather obvious since this group fundamentally overlaps with that half of our high school graduates who are not now going on to college.

Who gets education · who doesn't?

Challenging assumptions

But the prediction is likely to be fulfilled only if certain assumptions are met:

First, there will be a significent increase in the proportion of youth entering college in the coming decade. Fiscal stringency, increased student costs, and doubts about the economic return from education cast doubt on this assumption.

Second, we will stop assessing human talent in the limited ways we've been using--namely separating the able from the unable on the basis of academic achievement in numerical and formal language skills. More of the "lower half" will enter college if our values about human talents and our methods of assessing them should change.

Third, there will be a substantial reprogramming of post-secondary education--providing "less time, more options"; cooperating in new ways with the world of work and social services; supplementing the academic-scholarly syndrome with human development objectives in higher education. Retrenchment in higher education is likely to strengthen orthodoxy and weaken innovation.

Although no other country comes close to our 50 per cent mark of high school graduates attending college (about 42 percent of the age group 18-21) we

falter in pushing on to universal post-secondary education or more realistically universal-access education. Clearly universal education beyond high school is just not in the cards. Enrollment predictions show no likelihood of such increases in college enrollment. Existing college programs and faculties are hard pressed to show that they can or even seek to serve the large numbers of students of modest abilities and resources which were the new students of the 60's. The mortality rates of the "old" new students across the array of institutions which admit them remain staggering. The emphasis on <u>access</u> in the sixties blinded us to our unreadiness either at the school level to prepare the majority of students for further education or at the college level to remedy the resulting deficiencies and then move on to the further development of diverse talents, skills, and interests.

Universal education beyond high school not in cards

The advocacy of <u>universal-access</u> is a way of backing down under pressure of economic and political realities. It represents a reaffirmation of meritocracy in American education. It means, as the Carnegie Commission has clearly stated, "We start where we are.. we assume an equal pool of <u>intellectual ability</u> among men and women, among members of majority and minority groups.. we expect that higher education, in the forseable future, will help to draw persons of <u>high ability</u> in about equal

Universal access is a reaffirmation of meritocracy

proportions from all groups..." (emphasis mine). This is the very essence of the meritocratic argument and harks back to the President's Advisory Commission of 1947. The commission estimated that 49 percent of the population could profit from two years of postsecondary education and that at least 32 percent had the capacity for a normal 4-year course. The wide support for this philosophy within the educational establishment and among political leaders suggests to me that we are not in transition from meritocracy to egalitarianism, but are entering a new phase of meritocracy--let us label it Meritocracy II.

Meritocracy II

Meritocracy II does not promise an equality of opportunity as yet unrealized. Again, in the words of the Carnegie Commission, "By the year 2000, there should be no barriers to preventing any individual from achieving the occupational level which his talents warrant and which his interests led him to seek." When viewed within the context of the American political crisis, national and world economic chaos, and the apparent loss of confidence in traditional higher education, Meritocracy II may be the best we can expect.

But when the new meritocracy is viewed within the context of rising aspirations and the high social cost of limiting the development of the less intellectually able, it becomes another matter.

Meritocracy II becomes a frightening policy for the future if it provides a defense for financial aid plans which force the undereducated out of the market; or for public tuition schedules to protect private institutions, thus depriving colleges and universities to maintain the status quo in curriculum and teaching.

Meritocracy II has frightening aspects

Student flow studies continue to show how the elite private and public colleges and universities cream off the high ability, high social class, high achieving, but low risk students. Our flow charts on this and similar variables show how the college population is divided among the elite institutions, the enrollment-hungry state universities, and the open-door community colleges. Darley established the facts on institutional diversity almost two decades ago, concluding that there were colleges around which would take almost anyone who wanted to go...and had the money.

Even a short time ago such culling of students--essentially on the basis of academic achievement, family status, and ethnic background--was, however deliberate, much less the result of state and national planning than it is today. The past decade of expansion has also been one of master planning for systems of post-secondary education. One result has been an increased separation of youth--the poor and undereducated attending certain types of institutions, while the bright and affluent attend

Culling of students—increased separation

others. Educational planners have been embarrassed to discover that today the mean family income of certain public universities are equal to those of elite private universities; and that the per student costs of trying to educate those who need the most help is much less than the cost of educating the high achievers. A widespread belief, right or wrong, is that the poor but badly educated are subsidizing the rich and well educated.

Per student costs less for educating low achievers

The idea of selective admissions within complex systems of higher education has much to recommend it. But in practice grave inequities have arisen, in part for the following reasons:

Selective admissions grave inequities

1. Articulation of program and admission policies among institutions is inadequate. Thus the mobility of students within the systems is thwarted. The full educational development for many students requires movement within systems over time, place, and purpose...when qualified.
2. No substantial efforts have been made to determine the real cost of educating students in different types of institutions--and thus the actual allocation of resources within state systems may be dysfunctional to the goal of preparing students to move developmentally within

systems of differentiated institutions having different criteria for admission.

3. Rational student use over the college years of whole systems of differentiated institutions (community colleges, state colleges, liberal arts colleges, and universities) in achieving full development is something that very few students, parents, or school people know very much about. It seems apparent that if selective use of educational systems is not part of school and college guidance and of the decision making individual students--the legitimate goals of state master planning break down.

Mass education beyond school needs diverse institutions

In discussing the future structures of higher education, representatives from the Western nations agreed in Paris in 1973 that mass or popular education beyond school required diverse institutions relevant to the differing career and developmental needs of new groups of young and older students. We were not able to agree that facilitating the movement of students within such systems is the business of legislative bodies, educational leadership, and those at the school, college, and community levels who get involved in the educational decisions of students. While it is true that the United States is well ahead of other

nations in the articulation among institutions in order to serve students over time; the gears are creaking, and may jam if the recent free-for-all continues in the competition for students. Such competition may be a throw-back to more primitive utilization of our educational resources in the coming decade which Lyman Glenny describes as "The 60's in Reverse". Even Meritocracy II is threatened if we cannot make the systems work for the maximum development of students who must enter the systems at different points, "stop in and out", and move up when their readiness has been demonstrated. Without such flexibility, certain institutions and programs become deadends, making the claims of equality of opportunity ring false.

Flexibility - "stop in and out"

For the past two decades this nation has dared to demonstrate that equality of opportunity and excellence in higher education are not incompatible. The evidence is clear that while our emphasis has been on <u>quantity</u> in the post-World II period, the achievement level of students in American higher education until recently did not suffer. In some institutions it has in fact measurably increased, primarily because of the great influx of high ability students from middle SES and blue collar families. Thus, even with the continued use of traditional measures of merit, "more" did not mean "worse" as feared by many European observers of our spectacular

Equality of opportunity and excellence in higher education are not incompatable

efforts to increase educational opportunity beyond the school years.

But we appear to be losing our confidence as we see evidence of lower test scores and achievement. Prestigious bodies and influential spokesmen associated with the politics of higher education are blowing the whistle on continued expansion of the college world. Disregarding the philosophies and motives which may influence policy recommendations of such groups as the Committee on Economic Development, the Carnegie Commission, the CEEB's Committee on Student Economics, the cumulative message is sobering and useful.

Losing our confidence as we see evidence of lower test scores

It suggests the need for a plateau in our development--a period to assess the achievements and damages of the post-war growth. Above all, the cautious optimism of this view, which is nowhere more clearly stated that in the Final Report of the Carnegie Commission, calls for reform of our institutions in order to close the gaps between our claims and our achievements. I need not spend time detailing the dimensions of such reforms. But they involve our schools, our colleges, and other institutions engaged in further education which includes industry, the military, and certain social agencies. In brief we need more effective institutional management and allocation of scarce resources; clarification and re-creation of new senses of purpose in our colleges and universities; new approaches to

Plateau in our development

achieve equity and adequacy in student support; affirmation of the primacy of teaching and student development in all institutions and support for research in the great universities; the creation of additional options for further education both within and outside formal higher education; and more effective modes of learning/teaching.

Altering our goals as to who goes to college.

Leland Medsker, before his recent death, believed that this country was in the process of altering its goals with respect to who should go to college as well as when and how they should go. This prediction would suggest that Meritocracy II would reaffirm traditional notions of quality in student achievement within a somewhat more flexible and enriched set of options for the meritorious to choose from. Given the conditions of our society and our fallibility in educating the deprived and under-educated, a plateau in the expansion of the formal domain of post-secondary education may be America's only real alternative. But this must not mean turning back (or the"60's in Reverse") in our ultimate commitment to develop all of the abilities of all the people.

Meritocracy III

Meritocracy III (or whatever phase number destiny may untimately assign to it) would be quite something else again. It would affirm the merit of all persons and not limit formal educational development to that minority of our

people who are intellectually gifted or who are highly interested and prepared to achieve in an academically competitive world. The range of human talents and sensibilities far exceed those which have currency today in either our schools or colleges.

Quality and merit at all levels - a goal

Meritocracy III would not limit access or the possibility of educational success to the upper third or the upper half of this or that limited definition of human talent. It envisions learning environments throughout life when one's uniqueness is respected and served by teachers, programs, and educational policies. It would honor quality and merit at all levels while rejecting false or inappropriate standards of goodness.

Our studies have shown how precarious the decision-making processes are as young people move through school into the uncertain worlds of young adulthood. Those who most need help in assessing themselves and finding ways of succeeding are the ones who believe that adults at home and school fail them. Those who are least motivated and able in academic competition are the ones who believe that we educators are not interested in them and that the institutions we build don't fit them. Those who don't know what the options are, who have little consumer information as they shop or flop about are the late deciders or defaulters in making decisions about the future. They get swept along or away in the tide

Decision-making processes are precarious

of humanity which flows from our schools each spring.

Reaffirmation of belief in educability and merit of all

As we build more substantial structures for the continuing education of those who now fit our written and unwritten beliefs about who should be educated, when, and where--let us reaffirm our belief in the educability and the merit of all people. The educational aspirations of Americans for themselves and their children will not dimish because the wells of our reqources to respond have seemingly gone dry. Or because our will and talents for education have shriveled up. A special structure of have and have nots based on educational disparity may be more devisive for our society than if defined by economics. In truth such inequities are inevitably bound together.

We know that the potential of human beings to learn and to achieve satisfying lives is infinitely greater and more varied than our current practices suggest. Let us not compromise on this knowledge as we build a better basis for responding to the life-long educational needs of all our people. As the builders of Meritocracy II we should be the architects of Meritocracy III.

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